Sidebands

W2EGB

The Newsletter of the EAST GREENBUSH AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

March 2026

www.egara.org

President Emeritus - Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ President - Patrick Negus, W2PMN Vice-President - Walt Snyder, N2WJR
Secretary - David Jaeger, Jr. - K2DEJ Treasurer, Pete Brickman, KD2YLG
Board Members: Tom Scorsone, KC2FCP - Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ - Don Mayotte, KB2CDX

EGARA Estate Sale Boosts Club's Finances

Sales of equipment donated by an estate to EGARA in February have begun and the proceeds have substantially increased the club's financial resources. Sales began after a complete inventory was completed and estimated fair market values were placed on each item. The list was then made available first to club members, after which it was posted on the EGARA.org website.

The largest single purchase was made by Len Signoretti, W2LEN, who bought several radios, batteries and accessories. Several club members also picked up gear at bargain prices, including brand new dual band radios, all-band receivers and other ham equipment.

A number of items remain available for purchase and the list of those items can be downloaded from the club's website, where it is regularly updated. The local Amateur Radio Trader Net has also promoted the club's estate sale. It runs every Wednesday evening at 8pm on "The Big 94" repeater at 146.940 mhz. Anyone interested in purchasing an item can send an inquiry to EGARAradio@gmail.com.

The club also plans to offer those items still on hand at its annual Hamfest on May 30th. This year's Hamfest will be held at the East Greenbush Town Park.

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EGARA Elections Set for April Meeting

Club elections will be held during the April membership meeting, with all executive offices on the ballot, along with one board position.

Any club member in good standing (dues current), may run for election. Those members who are interested should submit their nomination to the club's email address -- EGARAradio@gmail.com -- to be included on the ballot. Nominations will also be solicited at the April meeting.

The offices of President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary are for one-year terms. The open board position is for a three-year term.
All members are encouraged to consider running for one of the open positions, as the club's success depends on everyone's involvement.

Membership Meeting - March 12, 2026 @ 7 pm - Club Elections

US Court Suspends Trump Layoff of Hundreds at Voice of America

A federal judge in Washington ordered the Trump administration to pause the layoffs of hundreds of employees from the agency that owns the U.S. news service Voice of America, adding that government officials had shown "concerning disrespect" for the court's directives.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth halted the plan while he determines whether the U.S. Agency for Global Media complied with an injunction he issued in April that it "fulfills its statutory mandate that VOA serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news."

The layoffs would affect 532 jobs for full-time staff, representing most of the agency's remaining employees. VOA broadcasts were abruptly shut down in March under an executive order from U.S. President Donald Trump. Lamberth said in his written order that he "no longer harbors any doubt" that the defendants, which include the agency and its acting CEO Kari Lake, "lack a plan to comply with the preliminary injunction".

Instead, they have "been running out the clock on the fiscal year while remaining in violation of even the most meager reading of USAGM and Voice of America's statutory obligations," he said.

"President Trump was elected to root out waste, fraud, and abuse across the federal government – including at Voice of America – and today, an activist judge attempted to subvert the will of the American people," White House spokesperson Liz Huston said in a statement. "The Trump Administration will appeal this outrageous decision, and we are confident we will ultimately prevail in court."

VOA employees who filed the lawsuit said in a statement that they were "extremely gratified" by the decision and "believe the wholesale silencing of VOA broadcasts and the removal of critical staff and expertise go against what Congress intended."

President Lee Saunders of the public-sector union the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees -- which is the case's primary plaintiff and whose attorneys are representing the employees -- called the decision "a major victory for Voice of America workers, including AFSCME members, and for those across the globe who depend on the work they do to access free and fair reporting."

"Sometimes we're finding that a key tea supplier is just not able to provide the volumes that they did the previous year."

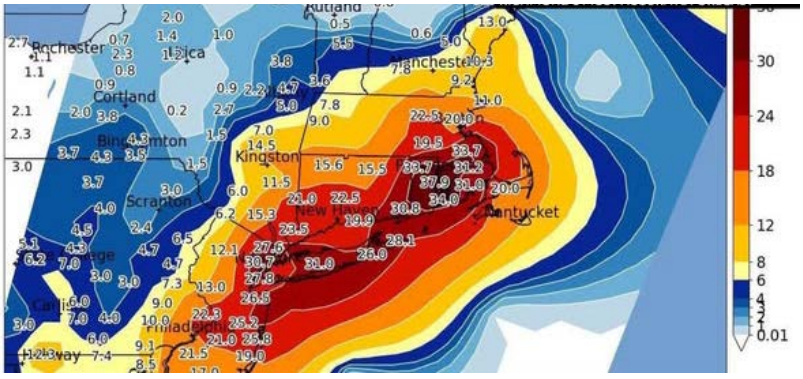
Trump, who clashed with VOA during his first term, picked Lake, a former news anchor, to be its director for his second. Lake, a staunch ally of the president, has often accused mainstream media of harboring anti-Trump bias. Founded in 1942 to counter Nazi propaganda, VOA reached 360 million people a week in 2024, according to a USAGM report to Congress.

Lamberth, who was appointed by President Ronald Reagan, has been hearing a batch of lawsuits challenging the legality of Trump's March executive order. The cases include one filed by Michael Abramowitz, VOA's director.

Hams Help Forecasters with Real-Time Data on Northeast Blizzard

The historic blizzard that paralyzed much of the Northeast in late February saw Amateur Radio operators on the air to help forecasters keep track of the storm's impact. Southeastern New England was one of the hardest-hit areas. Fortunately, the much of the Capital District was spared the brunt of the storm.

However, the severe blizzard left its mark on Southeast New England with massive amounts of snow, vehicles and even plows getting stuck, damaging winds gusts to hurricane force and causing some 350,000 customers to lose power in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and some coastal flooding issues at high tide. The blizzard broke Rhode Island's state record for snowfall with 37.8 inches of snow in Providence. ARES-SKYWARN Nets across southern New England were activated with the WX1BOX amateur radio team to support the National Weather Service (NWS) Boston/Norton office, as well as local and state emergency management and broadcast media, with timely updates on the storm.



The Blizzard of February 2026 dumped record amounts of snow, activating ARES-SKYWARN Nets

ARES-SKYWARN nets were activating every 1-2 hours. providing snowfall, wind gust, wind damage and coastal flood reports. The nets were very active with great participation, allowing a comprehensive situational awareness. Information was also received from many non-amateur radio SKYWARN spotters via social media.

Reports of snowfalls as high as 43 inches in Tiverton, Rhode Island, and 41 inches in Fall River, Massachusetts, were received from SKYWARN spotters. New Bedford, Msssachusetts, recorded 37 inches of snow.

Amateur Radio SKYWARN Nets were active on over a dozen repeaters across southern New England, along with the New England Amateur Radio VoIP Reflector system with snowfall, wind damage and wind gust reports. The Amateur Radio Net Plan for Massachusetts was sent into Massachusetts Emergency Management as part of a closer working relationship with state emergency management officials. Well over 1,000 reports were generated from these nets and shared with partner agencies and the media. Blizzard conditions were met at numerous sites across southern New England.

Eastern Massachusetts ARES was placed on stand-by on Sunday, February 22nd for any partner agencies and to augment and enhance support for the ARES-SKYWARN Nets for participation. Cape Cod ARES members Chris Ranney, WA1CMR, and Dennis Driscoll, N1DRN, deployed to support operations in the town of Sandwich, providing auxiliary communications between their EOC and a shelter for the town. Their operation secured on Wednesday evening, February 25.

Amateur radio received media attention on The Weather Channel several times throughout the blizzard. Forecaster Jim Cantore stated, "When we get all these observations, it comes from SKYWARN spotters and amateur radio operators because when people can't communicate and the phone lines down, the amateur radio operators are all we got."

EGARA February Meeting Minutes

- The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.
- Introductions were made by all members.
- Pizza and beverages were served and a fund raiser raffle was held to generate revenue for the club.
- President Patrick Negus, W2PMN, and Secretary David Jaeger, Jr. - K2DEJ were unavailable to attend and no reports were made by them.
- Vice President's Report: Walt Snyder, N2WJR, had no report to make.
- Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Peter Brickman, KD2YLG provided an update on the club's bank account and accepted dues and raffle proceeds.
- Board of Directors Report: Board member Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, announced that the club had received a large donation of amateur Radio equipment and related items from a local estate. An inventory listing of the available items was shared with the members, who were given the first opportunity to make purchases. The listing would then be opened to the public and placed on the club's website. Jackson estimated the value of the donation to be several thousand dollars, as many of the items were new and unused.
- Jackson also noted that the club's annual liability insurance premium was due and he would make the payment prior to the March 22nd renewal date.
- Jackson thanked member Walt Snyder, N2WJR for assisting with the cleaning the SAR Building the previous week.
- Member Updates: there were no member updates given.
- The meeting concluded at 8:15 PM.

-- Minutes recorded by Secretary, David Jaeger, K2DEJ

April is the Deadline for Dues

A quick reminder that membership dues must be paid in time for the club's April meeting in order to participate in the annual election of EGARA officers. This applies to both being eligible to run for office, as well as to vote as a member in good standing.

If you need to submit dues, it's quick, easy and safe to do it online at: www.EGARA.org/pay-dues.

The 2026 rates remain the same, with an individual membership at $25 and a family membership at $35. There are also options for mutli-year memberships that offer discounts.

So, don't delay... do it today!

Radio Clubs Encouraged to Plan Now for April Ham Radio Open House

ARRL is inviting radio clubs to participate in the second annual Ham Radio Open House in April. Hosting an Open House gives clubs and schools the opportunity to promote amateur radio science and technology by opening their stations to the public and showcasing their hi-tech gear and operating skills. EGARA members will discuss how the club might participate during its regular membership meeting on March 12th.

Clubs are being encouraged to set up in public places or conduct outdoor activities, such as a Parks on the Air (POTA) activations or satellite operating demonstrations. The event centers around World Amateur Radio Day on Saturday, April 18, but clubs may schedule an open house at any time during the month.

Ham Radio Open House highlights the Amateur Radio Service as a platform for developing and practicing modern radio communications technology, and as a hands-on pathway into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields for the next generation. The event offers clubs the chance to reshape perceptions of amateur radio and demonstrate how it serves as a steppingstone and testbed for young people pursuing STEM education and high-tech careers.

As ARRL CEO David Minster, NA2AA, wrote in his March QST editorial, "the notion of hams sitting in Grandpa's basement listening to tube radios is quickly dispelled when visitors see a modern transceiver and computer being used to work the world!"

Clubs are encouraged to demonstrate the latest digital modes, such as FT8 using WSJT-X. This is an excellent opportunity to explore emerging areas of amateur radio and show how the service remains at the forefront of wireless innovation.

For example, visitors might see a Software-Defined Radio (SDR) waterfall display, hear the corresponding signal, and watch the decoded message appear on screen — a powerful demonstration of how modern amateur radio works.

World Amateur Radio Day, observed annually on April 18, is celebrated worldwide by radio amateurs and their national associations, organized as member-societies of the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU). It was on this day in 1925 that the IARU was formed in Paris. American Radio Relay League (ARRL) Co-Founder Hiram Percy Maxim was its first president.

The inaugural ARRL Ham Radio Open House last year coincided with IARU's centennial celebrations. This year's activity is part of ARRL's "Year of the Club" theme.

An interactive, map-based Ham Radio Open House Locator is also available at" ***www.arrl.org/world-amateur-radio-day.***

SARATOGA COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

UMPTEENTH ANNUAL SWAPFEST

WHEN: 7 am, Saturday, March 14, 2026
Admission: Free !!!!
WHERE: Cornell Cooperative Extension Building (aka Solar Building)
50 West High Street (Rt 67 W), Ballston Spa, NY 12020

Event Highlights

- Refreshments available
- Door Prize Raffle: Win a Yaesu FT-65R!

Tables are limited to those in the room and will be on a first come, first serve basis.

VE Test Session

- For new licensees and upgrades, held at Noon in the same facility.
- SwapFest closes at 11:00 AM to set up for thé exam session starting at Noon.
- Please pre-registe for test session at hamstudy.org.

Talk-in repeaters

147.00, 147.36, or 147 24 MHz.
PL tone: 91.5 Hz for all.

Contact Jim at KG2H@arrl.net

The Essential Guide to Digital Ham Radio Modes

Digital Ham Radio Modes for New Operators

Digital ham radio has grown from a niche interest into something truly amazing over the past 15 years. What started with basic computer connections has evolved into sophisticated systems that let us do things we could only dream about before.

While good old analog still works great, digital modes open up exciting new possibilities for operators. The best part? You don't need to break the bank anymore. A DMR radio can be found for as little as $60 that can do things expensive radios from 10 years ago couldn't touch. These newer radios pack some impressive features:

- GPS location sharing built in;
- Two separate conversations on one frequency;
- Crystal clear audio even with weak signals;
- Simple computer programming.

Diving into digital modes can seem overwhelming at firs, That's exactly why this guide can help you get started -- from everything from basic setup to making your first contact and whether you're interested in text messaging across continents or crystal-clear voice chats.

This guide focuses on getting started with common digital modes in the US. While most principles apply globally, some details might differ in other countries.

Let's break down the difference between analog and digital ham radio in a way that makes sense. Think of analog radio like drawing a continuous line – the signal flows smoothly from one point to another. Digital radio, on the other hand, is more like creating that same line using tiny dots – it's still a line, but made up of individual pieces of information.

What makes digital modes different from analog --

The biggest difference between analog and digital is how they handle the signal. When you speak into a digital radio, it chops up your voice into tiny pieces, converts them to numbers, and then sends those numbers over the air. The radio on the other end puts those pieces back together. Here's what makes this really cool – unlike analog signals that get fuzzy and scratchy as they get weaker, digital signals stay crystal clear until they drop out completely. It's like watching a digital TV channel – perfect picture until it disappears, rather than gradually getting snowy like the old analog TVs.

One feature of digital modes is how efficient they are with frequency space. Take DMR for example – it can handle two separate conversations on the same frequency. That's like having a two-lane highway where there used to be just one lane.

Digital modes also have some clever tricks up their sleeve. They can detect and fix transmission errors automatically, and they send extra information like call signs and GPS coordinates along with your voice.

The evolution of digital communication in ham radio --

Ham radio's digital journey has unfold over the years. It all started way back in the 1940s with RTTY – basically connecting mechanical typewriters to radios. Things really took off in the 1980s when microprocessors came along, leading to packet radio becoming a big deal for message forwarding.

The 1990s brought us PSK31, which was pretty revolutionary – finally, a digital mode designed specifically for hams rather than borrowed from commercial services. By the 2000s, WSJT appeared, along with its suite of weak-signal modes. It allowed making contacts that would have been impossible with traditional modes.

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Getting into Digital...

Today, there's quite a buffet of digital modes to choose from:

- FT8 – The go-to mode for DX work these days
- PSK31 – Great for actual conversations using your computer
- RTTY – Still going strong in contests
- Digital voice modes – D-STAR, DMR, System Fusion, and P25

Benefits of digital modes for new operators --

One of the great benefits of digital modes is that you don't need a lot of power to make contacts. You can work stations worldwide using just 10 watts and a simple wire antenna. Some modes -- like FT8 and JT65 -- are absolute wizards at pulling signals out of the noise.

Digital modes also take away some of the "mike fright" that keeps new operators from making contacts. With standardized formats and computer-assisted operation, it's much less intimidating than getting on voice. Plus, if you're into computers, digital modes let you combine both hobbies.

Some hams have grumbled that modes like FT8 are "killing ham radio", but digital modes especially resonate with many younger operators. These modes appeal to those who might never have given ham radio a second look. Sure, some digital contacts are quick exchanges, but modes like PSK31 and JS8Call let you have proper conversations if that's more your style.

The beauty of digital modes is there's something for everyone. Whether you want quick DX contacts or lengthy chats, simple operation or technical challenges, there's a digital mode that fits your style. Digital modes often gives excellent results when the bands seem dead for traditional operation.

Essential Equipment for Digital Ham Radio --

Let's consider the gear you'll need for digital modes. Today, it's gotten way easier and cheaper than when digital modes first came on the scene.

Here's the good news – pretty much any HF radio can work for digital modes. The newer rigs like the Yaesu FT-710, Icom IC-7300, IC-7100, and Yaesu FT-991A make it super simple with built-in sound cards. Just plug in a USB cable and you're ready to go.

But what if you're looking at older or entry-level rigs? Take the Icom IC-718 – it's a great radio, but at $860, you'll still need to add an interface. There are some clever alternatives though. The QDX transceiver is like a Swiss Army knife for digital modes, with everything built right in. Or check out the Tr(u)SDX – at just $138, it covers five HF bands and works great for FT8, JS8Call, and RTTY. Even if you're just starting with limited privileges, consider getting an all-band HF radio. You'll thank yourself later when you upgrade your license,

Interface devices and sound cards --

The interface is like the translator between your radio and computer. There are many ways to go -- from cheap to expensive -- but here's what really works.

The SignaLink USB is a "go-to" recommendation. Here's why:

- Built-in sound card that just works
- Solid isolation (no nasty ground loops!)
- Easy-to-adjust front panel controls
- Works with practically any radio out there

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Getting into Digital...

RIGblaster makes some great interfaces too. Users report operating it with over 100 different programs without issues. For the budget-conscious operators, you can cobble together a basic setup with a cheap USB sound card and isolator for about $15. Just be prepared for some trial and error getting it working right.

Some other solid options include:

- Digirig: Simple but effective
- Timewave Navigator: Great if you want the bells and whistles
- microKEYER II: Perfect for mixing voice and digital modes

Software options for different operating systems --

Now for the fun part – the software that makes it all work. The best part? Most of it's free! You should get consistently excellent results from these programs when used with even basic equipment.

FLdigi is like the Swiss Army knife of digital modes. It does everything – CW, PSK, RTTY, you name it. Works on pretty much any computer too. For weak signal work, ***WSJT-X*** is absolutely essential. FT8 has become the most popular digital mode out there, and this is the software that makes it happen.

If you're just starting out, try ***DigiPan*** – it's about as simple as it gets for PSK31. Want something fancier? ***Ham Radio Deluxe*** ties everything together nicely, though you'll have to pay for it.

These three pieces – radio, interface, and software – work together to make contacts possible that would be impossible with voice modes. Pick up either a modern rig with built-in sound card or add an interface to your existing radio, grab some free software, and you'll be making digital contacts in no time.

Popular Text-Based Digital Modes --

Text-based digital modes have come a long way from their mechanical beginnings. It's amazing to see how they've evolved from clunky teletype machines to sophisticated computer programs that can pull signals out of seemingly impossible conditions.

RTTY: The grandfather of digital modes: RTTY holds a special place in ham radio history. While it started in commercial and military use, hams couldn't legally use it until the 1950s. The technology is pretty straightforward – it switches between two frequencies (2125 Hz for "mark" and 2295 Hz for "space") with a 170 Hz difference between them.

Don't let RTTY's modest 60-words-per-minute speed fool you. Even with its limited character set (just uppercase letters, numbers, and basic punctuation), RTTY remains incredibly popular for contests and DX work. Here's why:

- Works great in crowded band conditions (needs only 300 Hz)
- Slow speed actually helps in noisy conditions
- Every RTTY setup speaks the same language

PSK31 for keyboard-to-keyboard communication: PSK31 came along in 1998 when Peter Martinez (G3PLX) designed it specifically for ham radio conversations. Unlike RTTY's frequency-hopping approach, PSK31 changes the signal's phase to form characters. The "31" comes from its speed – 31.25 baud matches typical typing speed.

Here's what makes PSK31 truly impressive – it only needs about 31 Hz of bandwidth. That means you can fit up to 20 PSK31 conversations in the space needed for one SSB voice contact. Pretty efficient!

You get two flavors of PSK31:

- BPSK: The basic version without error correction
- QPSK: Adds error correction for those tricky fading signals

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Getting into Digital...

The best part about PSK31? You don't need much power. You can consistently get excellent results making worldwide contacts with just 10-25 watts. Perfect if you're running basic equipment or have antenna restrictions.

FT8 and the revolution in weak signal operation: FT8 changed everything when Joe Taylor (K1JT) and Steve Franke (K9AN) introduced it. The ARRL wasn't kidding when they called it "by far the most popular digital mode". This mode can decode signals you can't even hear – down to -21dB below the noise!

Unlike chatty modes like PSK31, FT8 runs like clockwork. Every transmission takes exactly 12.6 seconds in precise 15-second cycles. It just sends the basics – call signs, signal reports, and confirmations. Simple but effective. Sure, some operators grumble that FT8 killed conversation in ham radio. But when band conditions are terrible, FT8 still gets through.

Want the best of both worlds? Try JS8 – it combines FT8's weak-signal magic with actual message capabilities. Pick up either mode and you'll be amazed at what's possible even when the bands seem dead.

Digital Voice Modes Compared

Every digital voice mode has its own personality, so let's break down what makes each one special, and more importantly, which might work best for your setup and budget.

D-STAR: Features and accessibility: D-STAR came from the Japan Amateur Radio League (JARL) as their gift to Amateur Radio. The tech specs are pretty impressive – it uses GMSK modulation running at 4.8 kbps and only needs 6.25 kHz of bandwidth. What really makes D-STAR shine is how it handles voice compression through the AMBE vocoder. One of features is the worldwide linking – you can call someone without knowing exactly where they are. The system remembers where they were last heard and routes your call there.

D-STAR gives you two flavors of operation:

- DV mode: Voice plus some data (950 bps) for stuff like GPS coordinates
- DD mode: Full-on data mode at 128 kbps, mostly on 1.3 GHz

The catch? You'll mostly be looking at Icom and Kenwood radios, and they're not cheap. Plus, you'll need to register for a call sign in the system – no anonymous operation here.

DMR: Time slots and talk groups explained: DMR started in commercial radio but really found its groove with hams because the radios are so affordable. Here's what makes it clever – instead of using one channel at a time like D-STAR, DMR splits each channel into two time slots. Think of it like a super-fast game of catch – your radio transmits for 30ms, then listens for 30ms. This neat trick gives you:

- Two conversations on one frequency
- Better use of available spectrum
- Double the data rate of D-STAR

Talk groups are where DMR really shines. You get two types:

- Static groups: Always there on the repeater
- Dynamic groups: Pop up when needed, hang around for 15 minutes after use

The best part? You can grab a DMR radio for $50-100. Just remember you'll need to register for a DMR ID number instead of using your call sign.

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Getting into Digital...

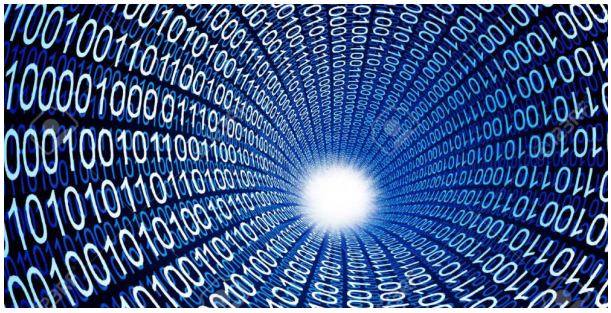
Fusion/C4FM: Yaesu's approach to digital voice: Yaesu came along in 2013 with System Fusion, running C4FM at 9.6 kbps in a 12.5 kHz channel. I've found it works remarkably well in noisy conditions. They built in four different modes:

- V/D Mode: Voice plus data in one stream
- Voice FR Mode: High-quality voice when you need it
- Data FR Mode: Quick data transfers at 9.6 kbps
- Analog FM Mode: Works with your old FM gear

The smart part? It automatically figures out if an incoming signal is digital or analog. No fumbling with mode switches when someone calls. For networking, they use something called Wires-X rooms. Unlike the others, you don't have to register to use it.

P25 and other specialized modes: P25 comes from public safety radio but works great for hams too. The audio quality is fantastic, and different brands of radios play nice together. Just be ready for sticker shock on the equipment. Some other interesting options include:

- NXDN: Popular in commercial radio
- FreeDV: Open-source with free codec
- M17: New kid on the block, also open-source



Summarizing the options:

DMR gives you the most bang for buck and tons of activity. D-STAR costs more but has amazing routing capabilities. Fusion is super easy to use but locks you into Yaesu gear. P25 sounds incredible but you'll pay for it. Pick the one that matches your budget and operating style.

Setting Up Your First Digital Station

But once you understand the basics, even basic equipment can work surprisingly well. The first challenge is getting your radio talking to your computer. If your radio has 'DATA' or 'ACC' jacks, you're in luck – these work best. Quick tip from a painful lesson: make sure to turn off any speech compression or audio tweaks that might mess up your digital signals.

No data port? Don't worry – you can use the microphone and speaker connections. Just make sure you use proper isolation to avoid ground loops. An easy connection is to use a SignaLink USB interface – its built-in isolation transformers protect both the radio and computer. The interface does two important jobs: it handles the audio back and forth, and it keys your transmitter. CAT control -- (C)omputer (A)ided (T)ransceiver protocol -- works best. It's a generic term used to describe how your PC can remotely control the frequency and modes of your transceiver. The CAT commands (in general) are bi-directional works best for keying the radio. Simple, reliable, and it just works.

Configuring software for digital operation

Here's where things can get tricky. Follow these steps (and the order matters!):

- Install your interface drivers first, then sound card drivers
- Keep your radio's sound card separate from Windows default
- Set audio levels carefully – too high causes nasty splatter
- Get your computer clock synced up for FT8

For modes like FT8 where timing is critical, grab NetTime or JTSync. Programs like WSJT-X and FLdigi make life easier with their macro features. You should get excellent results using these programs once they are properly configured.

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Getting into Digital...

Making your first digital contact --

Before you jump in, check the band plan. It's usually recommended to start with PSK31 – it's pretty forgiving while you learn the ropes. Find an active frequency and just listen for a while. With FT8, the software handles the timing – just click on someone calling CQ and let it do its thing. For chatty modes like PSK31, macros help with the routine stuff while letting you add personal messages between. Pick either mode and you'll be making contacts in no time. Just remember, we all started somewhere – don't be afraid to make mistakes. That's how we learn!

Digital Mode Etiquette and Best Practices

Look, digital modes are amazing, but they only work well when everyone plays nice together. Here are some tips about keeping things running smoothly on the digital bands. Band plans might seem like suggestions, but they're really the glue that holds our digital frequencies together. The ARRL maintains the official U.S. band plan, though every region has its own tweaks based on local needs and noise patterns.

New to digital modes? Always check your local coordinated plans first. They override any general recommendations you might find online. You will find out pretty quick from other hams if you're operating where you shouldn't!

Call signs and identification requirements

Here's something that trips up a lot of new digital operators – proper ID requirements. Even though modes like D-STAR and Fusion automatically send your call sign, the FCC still wants voice or CW identification. The rules are pretty straightforward:

- ID at the end of your contact
- ID at least every 10 minutes during longer chats
- Voice or CW ID required regardless of mode

DMR and P25 only send ID numbers, not call signs. To stay legal, it's best to throw in a quick voice ID periodically. Better safe than sorry when it comes to FCC regulations!

Macro usage and automated responses

Macros -- a single computer keystroke programmed to execute a series of commands, such as sending your call sign -- make digital life easier, but they can also make you look silly if not used right.

When setting up your macros:

- Include RSID tags so others can identify your signal
- Use the IARU RSQ system for signal reports
- End with proper shorthand ("sk" for end, "kn" for directed transmission)

The beauty of digital modes lies in how we share the spectrum. Pick up either a busy frequency or a clear one, but always listen first. That's what makes digital ham radio work for everyone.

Conclusion

Digital modes using just basic setups allow you to work stations worldwide that would have been impossible with traditional modes. The best part? Getting started is simpler than ever. Now you just need:

- A basic radio
- Simple interface
- Computer with free software

Pick up either FT8 for working DX, PSK31 for actual conversations, or DMR for crystal-clear voice – there's something for every operating style. You'll get excellent results with each mode when used properly. Digital modes haven't killed traditional ham radio like some feared. Instead, they've opened up amazing new possibilities.

On the Beam
News & Notes

Spring Expected to Bring Helderberg Repeater Site Upgrades

EGARA's VHF Repeater is due for upgrades this Spring, including pattern improvements and restoration of EchoLink service.

The site is also monitored 24/7 with via security cameras and remote control.

Several major improvements are slated for Spring at the club's repeater site atop the Helderberg Mountains in New Scotland.

The first will be the relocation of the existing antenna system to the former analog tower of WTEN, allowing the repeater to have a clear path over nearby higher terrain that now interferes with its signal.

The second improvement will be to add a UHF repeater to the site, providing additional communication flexibility and redundancy, especially during emergency situations or when additional communication capabilities might be needed during community events.

In addition, the club has been offered the donation of a controller which is required to restore EchoLink service to the repeater system, allowing club members who are out of the area to access the machine.

Len Signoretti, W2LEN, has offered the donation of the needed controller and the club will provide him with a tax deduction letter in return as part of its status as a 501c3 non-profit organization.

Keep Your FRN Info Updated!

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted changes to its rules to require that every holder of an FCC Registration Number (FRN) to update their contact information in the CORES system (email and postal addresses) within ten business days of a change.

Because every FCC licensee—including amateur radio operators—must have an FRN to file applications, this requirement applies to all licensed amateurs. FRN contact information is handled separately and apart from contact information related to a license in the License Manager System. Both records must be kept up-to-date, and each requires a separate update.

Until now, no specific deadline existed for updating FRN or license contact information. Instead, the amateur rules at sections 97.21 and 97.23 provide that a license may be suspended or revoked "if FCC correspondence is returned as undeliverable because of an incorrect address/email." These provisions remain in effect as well as the 10-day deadline applicable to FRN information.

If your FRN information is current and has not changed, no immediate action is required, but you must adhere to the 10-day rule for future changes. It is recommended to periodically check both the CORES and License Manager Systems to ensure contact information is accurate, even if no changes have occurred. Help on updating FRN information is available at: ***https://apps.fcc.gov/cores/html/Update_FRN_Information.htm.***

W1AW 2026 Spring/Summer Operating Schedule

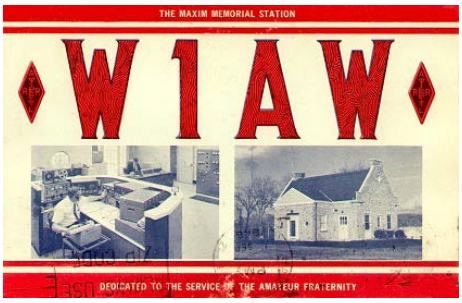
Morning Schedule:	Time	Mode	Days
	1300 UTC (9 AM EDT)	CWs	Wed, Fri
	1300 UTC (9 AM EDT)	CWf	Tue, Thu

Daily Visitor Operating Hours:
1400 UTC to 1945 UTC - (10 AM to 3:45 PM EDT)

Afternoon/Evening Schedule:

2000 UTC (4 PM EDT)	CWf	Mon, Wed, Fri
2000 " "	CWs	Tue, Thu
2100 " (5 PM EDT)	CWb	Daily
2200 " (6 PM EDT)	DIGITAL	Daily
2300 " (7 PM EDT)	CWs	Mon, Wed, Fri
2300 " "	CWf	Tue, Thu
0000 " (8 PM EDT)	CWb	Daily
0100 " (9 PM EDT)	DIGITAL	Daily
0145 " (9:45 PM EDT)	VOICE	Daily
0200 " (10 PM EDT)	CWf	Mon, Wed, Fri
0200 " "	CWs	Tue, Thu
0300 " (11 PM EDT)	CWb	Daily

Frequencies (MHz)



- **CW: 1.8025 3.5815 7.0475 14.0475 18.0775 21.0675 28.0675 50.350 147.555**
- **DIGITAL: - 3.5975 7.095 14.095 18.1025 21.095 28.095 50.350 147.555**
- **VOICE: 1.855 3.990 7.290 14.290 18.160 21.390 28.590 50.350 147.555**

Notes:

- **CWs = Morse Code practice (slow) = 5, 7.5, 10, 13, and 15 WPM**
- **CWf = Morse Code practice (fast) = 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 13, and 10 WPM**
- **CWb = Morse Code Bulletins = 18 WPM**
- **CW frequencies include code practices, Qualifying Runs, and CW bulletins.**
- **DIGITAL = BAUDOT (45.45 baud), BPSK31, and MFSK16 in a revolving schedule.**
- **Code practice texts are from QST, and the source of each practice is given at the beginning of each practice and at the beginning of alternate speeds.**
- **On Tuesdays and Fridays at 2230 UTC (6:30 PM EDT), Keplerian Elements for active amateur satellites are sent on the regular digital frequencies.**
- **A DX bulletin replaces or is added to the regular bulletins between 0000 UTC (8 PM EDT) Thursdays and 0000 UTC (8 PM EDT) Fridays.**
- **Audio from W1AW's CW code practices and CW/digital/phone bulletins are available using EchoLink via the W1AW Conference Server named "W1AWBDCT." The monthly W1AW Qualifying Runs are presented here as well. The CW/digital/phone audio is sent in real-time and runs concurrently with W1AW's regular transmission schedule.**
- **All users who connect to the conference server are muted. Please note that any questions or comments about this server should not be sent via the "Text" window in EchoLink. Please direct any questions or comments to w1aw@arrl.org.**
- **In a communications emergency, monitor W1AW for special bulletins as follows: Voice on the hour, Digital at 15 minutes past the hour, and CW on the half hour.**

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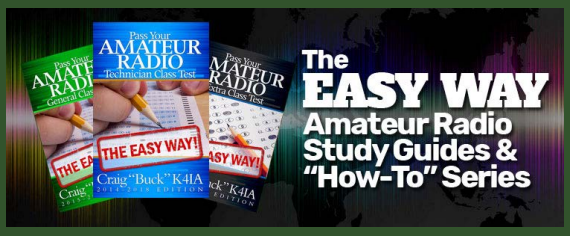

CALENDAR

March 12, 2026 @ 7 pm - Regular Monthly Club Meeting, Search & Rescue Building - Club Elections

May 30, 2026 - Annual EGARA Hamfest. East Greenbush Town Park.

Pro Tip: Ham Radio Cheat Sheets

Whether you're new to Ham radio or a long time operator, cheat sheets can be a handy tool to have.

Here are links to several that can be downloaded for quick reference to useful information:

Amateur Privileges by License Class:

- **https://orcuttchristian.org/Silver_Ham%20Radio%20For%20Dummies%20Cheat%20Sheet.pdf**

Amateur Band Plan & Grid Map:

- **https://www.icomamerica.com/lineup/amateur/Band_Plan_Map/**

General Amateur Radio Info:

- **https://hamradiofornontechies.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HAM-Radio-For-Non-Techies-Cheat-Sheet.pdf**

Ham Radio RFI Cheat Sheet:

- **https://palomar-engineers.com/wp-content/uploads/Ham-Radio-RFI-Solutions-Cheat-Sheet-1.**

The East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association

Organized in 1998, by Bert Bruins, N2FPJ, (SK) and Chris Linck, N2NEH, the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association, an ARRL affiliate, is committed to providing emergency services, educational programs, and operating resources to amateur radio operators and residents of the Capital Region of New York State. The club station is W2EGB. The club also has several VHF and UHF repeaters open to club members and the public.

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Seller Contact: EGARAradio@gmail.com

See the complete listing of gear for sale at: www.EGARA.org/amateur-radio-classifieds

Sell your unused gear with a free ad in Sidebands and online! Send details to: EGARAradio@gmail.com